

Cliff Hope at Favourable Lake Mine in 1938

by
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As part of a pioneering effort to gather information on the status and distribution of the birds of Ontario, Clifford E. Hope visited several places in the far northern parts of the province, under the direction of L.L. Snyder, for the Royal Ontario Museum between 1938 and 1948. A complete list of birds found in these various places has never been published, although a few significant records have found their way into several publications (such as Peck 1972; Peck and James 1983, 1987; and Cadman, Eagles and Helleiner 1987).

The following information was gleaned largely from an unpublished manuscript left by Hope in the files of the ROM. Additional material was taken from his field notes in the archives of the ROM. The notes provide a daily list of species and numbers seen, something that was essential to assessing the status of each species.

Hope's manuscript was concerned to a considerable extent with specimens collected, while my objective is to provide a list of species, an idea of their abundance and breeding status and, as it turns out, to correct a previously published item concerning the Lesser Yellowlegs. I have, therefore, omitted specific information about specimens, indicating only whether specimens were obtained by the ROM field party (#), or by someone subsequent to their departure (!). An asterisk (*)

following the species name indicates that some evidence of breeding was found. Specimen evidence to confirm breeding or nesting was secured in every instance where I have indicated breeding. Additional details about specimens or nesting and breeding records are available in the ROM.

Favourable Lake lies nearly 20 km west of Sandy Lake in the northwestern part of Ontario (52° 55' N, 93° 57' W) in the Severn River Drainage, at an elevation of nearly 300 m above sea level. The mine itself was about 12 km southeast of Favourable Lake (Figure 1). Hope, with L.A. Prince and G.M. Neal, travelled by train from Toronto to Winnipeg and then flew with Wings Limited, reaching South Trout Lake on 29 May 1938, and walking the final 5 km to the mine along a corduroy road. The party remained there until 6 August. Most observations were made within an 8 km radius of the mine. Travel was mainly on foot. A couple of them poled a raft down and back the almost 10 km of the end of Rathouse Bay - once.

Precambrian hills covered with sparse forest rose as much as 60 m above more low-lying glacial tills. Jack pine and mixed forest mainly of white birch, trembling aspen, white spruce and jack pine occurred on drier sites, giving way to black spruce in moist areas. Dense mixed second growth following earlier fires was found in several places. Lakes were

typically deep and clear with rocky shores. However, Setting Net and Borthwick Lakes, as well as Rathouse Bay, were shallow with extensive marshes, and with spruce bogs and alder swales surrounding them. A stump-studded clearing around the mine covered about half a square mile, with a dozen buildings and a small sawmill clustered about the mine shaft.

Mr. M.D. Banghart of Berens River Mines, owners of the mine,

arranged for the party to use one of the buildings for sleeping quarters, for laboratory space in another, and to obtain board at the mine cookhouse. Mr. William Goddard, cook in the mine kitchen, took a keen interest in their activities, and following their departure continued to collect additional material for another five months, and secured a number of specimens from the local Indian people.

Common Loon, *Gavia immer*: ! Rather rare; a maximum of three seen one day. They were very wary as they were apparently hunted for food in the area.

Pied-billed Grebe, *Podilymbus podiceps*: * # More numerous than loons, with 3 or 4 seen on several days on Rathouse Bay, and Borthwick Lake. Nests with eggs were found 9, 16, and 27 June.

Horned Grebe, *Podiceps auritus*: # A single bird found 29 July on South Trout Lake where no suitable nesting habitat was available.

Red-necked Grebe, *Podiceps grisegena*: * ! One pair noted through June and July on Borthwick Lake, and a nest with one egg was found 10 June.

American Bittern, *Botaurus lentiginosus*: # Rare, but present throughout the period in the Borthwick Lake and Rathouse Bay marshes.

Great Blue Heron, *Ardea herodias*: ! Reported only as a wanderer in late summer.

Green-winged Teal, *Anas crecca*: Four males were seen 27 June.

Mallard, *Anas platyrhynchos*: ! Rarely seen in June and July; more numerous in autumn.

Blue-winged Teal, *Anas discors*: * # Rarely observed, but a female was flushed from a nest beside Rathouse Bay on 22 June.

Ring-necked Duck, *Aythya collaris*: # The commonest breeding duck; 3 or 4 seen frequently. Three broods of 7 or 8 downy young were noted 24 July on Borthwick Lake.

Lesser Scaup, *Aythya affinis*: ! Reported only as an autumn migrant.

Common Goldeneye, *Bucephala clangula*: ! Rare during the summer with no evidence of breeding noted.

Bufflehead, *Bucephala albeola*: * # One to 3 seen frequently in early June and present on Borthwick Lake throughout the summer. Two broods of 8 and 3 young were seen on 24 July, these being the first breeding records for the province.

Osprey, *Pandion haliaetus*: ! Very rarely seen; specimens were of flying immatures secured shortly after Hope left the area, and may have been raised not far away.

Northern Harrier, *Circus cyaneus*: Seen only once, a juvenile flying about Rathouse Bay, on 31 July.

Sharp-shinned Hawk, *Accipiter striatus*: # Seen rarely throughout the summer.

Northern Goshawk, *Accipiter gentilis*: ! Not seen in summer, but 4 birds were removed from leg hold traps between 4 Nov. and 16 Dec.

Broad-winged Hawk, *Buteo platypterus*: # Rarely seen throughout the summer.

Red-tailed Hawk, *Buteo jamaicensis*: ! One bird seen several times in the same area along the creek flowing from Setting Net Lake.

American Kestrel, *Falco sparverius*: * # One to 3 seen almost daily often about the mine clearing. An egg nearly ready to lay was taken from a specimen on 30 May; young of the year were seen in early August.

Merlin, *Falco columbarius*: Only one seen on 31 July near Rathouse Bay.

Spruce Grouse, *Dendragapus canadensis*: * # Common in the area; broods first noted on 30 June and frequently thereafter.

Ruffed Grouse, *Bonasa umbellus*: * # Seen as frequently as Spruce Grouse, however, fewer broods were noted, beginning on 22 June.

Sharp-tailed Grouse, *Tympanuchus phasianellus*: ! Never seen during the summer, but reported regularly in the mine clearing from late October to mid-May.

Sora, *Porzana carolina*: * # Considered common in the marshes about Rathouse Bay and Borthwick Lake. Nests with eggs were found 16 and 27 June, the latter on the point of hatching.

American Coot, *Fulica americana*: ! Not seen in summer, a single bird was recorded 17 Sept.

Black-bellied Plover, *Pluvialis squatarola*: # Single migrant recorded 31 May.

Killdeer, *Charadrius vociferus*: * # Two pairs occupied the mine clearing. A nest with eggs was found 14 June, and broods of young from the other pair were seen 29 June and 9 July.

Greater Yellowlegs, *Tringa melanoleuca*: # Seen only once, an apparent migrant on 4 August.

Lesser Yellowlegs, *Tringa flavipes*: What was believed to be the first nest record for Ontario (Peck and James 1983) was one with 2 eggs found by Neal "amid bog pools" in the mine clearing on 4 June. These abandoned eggs were later collected. However, in reading Hope's manuscript he clearly states "No birds were ever seen at the nest." It so happened that on the same day, a mile away, two birds, apparently of this species, were seen flying overhead. No other Lesser Yellowlegs were ever seen during the entire month of June.

I wondered whether he could accurately identify the birds flying over (out of gun range?) and how distinctive were Lesser Yellowlegs eggs. In checking the egg measurements I found that they were completely outside the extreme small measurements for this species as given by Bent (1927). The measurements are in the range of both Common Snipe and Killdeer, the only other possibilities, the length being closer to the average for snipe and the width closer to the average for Killdeer. Hope's field notes indicate that he first thought it was a Killdeer nest, but later when he found a Killdeer nest to compare, he comments that "they certainly were not those of a Killdeer" and that he would compare them with snipe when he returned to the museum. The eggs are more blotched like typical snipe, but the ground colour is more buff like a typical Killdeer. There are variants of either species that approach these in colour, markings and size. The habitat where they were found is somewhat uncertain. His field notes just say "in the mine clearing". We know there were Killdeer there, but there were also snipe in the wetter places of the clearing. Does "amid bog pools", as found in his manuscript, indicate a vegetated area where a snipe might conceal a nest or a more open spot useable by a Killdeer? How much was he biased by what he thought they were? Doubtless Hope did not see these as typical of either snipe or Killdeer and he concluded they belonged to the only other shorebird of the appropriate size that he believed he saw there at the time, and he comments that he expected to find Lesser Yellowlegs there (rather than Greater Yellowlegs). Perhaps he felt that although the eggs were somewhat small, they were close enough to be those of Lesser Yellowlegs.

The identity of these eggs remains uncertain, but what we must conclude is that breeding for Lesser Yellowlegs was not established until Hope visited Fort Severn in 1940, where he collected downy young. And the first (and only) nest then, was not found until 1990, by A. Wormington, at Shagamu River.

Solitary Sandpiper, *Tringa solitaria*: * # Regular, but not common after late June. A flying juvenile with traces of downy plumage, taken 29 July was probably locally raised.

Spotted Sandpiper, *Actitis macularia*: * # Rare except on the river from Northwind Lake where six were seen one day. Juvenile birds were recorded 28 and 29 July at Borthwick Lake.

Least Sandpiper, *Calidris minutilla*: # Recorded as a rare late summer migrant.

Common Snipe, *Gallinago gallinago*: * # The commonest shorebird, seen and heard daily (and nightly) throughout June and most of July. Downy young and partially feathered juveniles encountered a number of times after 29 June. Second nesting is suggested by a female with well developed egg taken 18 July.

Ring-billed Gull, *Larus delawarensis*: ! A single bird was encountered 16 August.

Herring Gull, *Larus argentatus*: ! Rarely seen during the summer.

Common Tern, *Sterna hirundo*: # Seen in small numbers only on South Trout and Northwind Lakes. [Found nesting on Sandy Lake in 1937 by J. Satterly].

Black Tern, *Chlidonias niger*: * # A common species, particularly in Rathouse Bay. As many as 300 were seen on one day. Many nests were found, hatching commencing about 27 June.

- Great Horned Owl**, *Bubo virginianus*: * # Frequently heard in late July and early August. Two juveniles, not long out of the nest were found 29 July.
- Northern Hawk Owl**, *Surnia ulula*: ! Not seen during the summer, but reported in November.
- Common Nighthawk**, *Chordeiles minor*: * # As many as 10-12 seen almost daily. A newly hatched young was found 7 July.
- Ruby-throated Hummingbird**, *Archilochus colubris*: # On only one occasion, 8 July, two females were seen.
- Belted Kingfisher**, *Ceryle alcyon*: # Seen most days in small numbers about all lakes and rivers, but no nesting sites were located.
- Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**, *Sphyrapicus varius*: * # Regularly encountered in small numbers. Several nests found in July contained noisy young.
- Downy Woodpecker**, *Picoides pubescens*: * # Rarely encountered, and young of the year first seen 19 July.
- Hairy Woodpecker**, *Picoides villosus*: * # Also rarely seen; young of the year first encountered 8 July.
- Three-toed Woodpecker**, *Picoides tridactylus*: # Rarely encountered; a nest with fresh eggs was found 6 June.
- Black-backed Woodpecker**, *Picoides arcticus*: * # Also rarely encountered in spruce bogs. An alarmed female, 29 June, suggested a nest or young were nearby.
- Northern Flicker**, *Colaptes auratus*: * # Small numbers encountered most days. Several nests were found; young were noted out of the nest beginning 28 June.
- Pileated Woodpecker**, *Dryocopus pileatus*: ! Rarely seen; their excavations were more frequently encountered in mature woods.
- Olive-sided Flycatcher**, *Contopus borealis*: # Uncommon in spruce bogs.
- Yellow-bellied Flycatcher**, *Empidonax flaviventris*: # Uncommon in spruce bogs. Although no nests were found, birds became agitated on several occasions.
- Alder Flycatcher**, *Empidonax alnorum*: # Uncommon in alders and willows after arriving on 2 June, but no nests or young were seen.
- Least Flycatcher**, *Empidonax minimus*: * # Common in deciduous woods; many nests with eggs were found in the latter half of June.
- Eastern Phoebe**, *Sayornis phoebe*: * # Three widely separate pairs were noted. A nest and re-nests were located 30 May, 20 and 28 June at the mine.
- Eastern Kingbird**, *Tyrannus tyrannus*: * # A rare summer resident. A brood of four flying juveniles was noted 31 July.
- Purple Martin**, *Progne subis*: A single individual flew about the mine area for half an hour on 1 June.
- Tree Swallow**, *Tachycineta bicolor*: # Uncommon throughout the summer, but no nesting evidence was obtained.
- Gray Jay**, *Perisoreus canadensis*: * # Uncommon; fledged young were being fed by adults in early June.
- American Crow**, *Corvus brachyrhynchos*: # Occasional and usually only one or two seen, mainly in June.
- Common Raven**, *Corvus corax*: Rare and only occasionally seen through the summer.
- Black-capped Chickadee**, *Parus atricapillus*: * # Uncommon; six young flew from a nest found 15 June.
- Boreal Chickadee**, *Parus hudsonicus*: * # Rarely encountered, but young of the year were noted after 15 July.
- Red-breasted Nuthatch**, *Sitta canadensis*: Only one was heard 23 July.
- Brown Creeper**, *Certhia americana*: # Seen only a couple of times in mature woods near South Trout Lake.
- Winter Wren**, *Troglodytes troglodytes*: * # Uncommon in wet areas; fledged young were first encountered 6 July.
- Golden-crowned Kinglet**, *Regulus satrapa*: * # Uncommon in mature mixed woods. Juveniles not long out of the nest were encountered 7 July.

- Ruby-crowned Kinglet**, *Regulus calendula*: * # Common in black spruce bogs. Recently fledged young were noted 15 July.
- Eastern Bluebird**, *Sialia sialis*: Single pairs seen 5 and 11 June in the mine clearing.
- Swainson's Thrush**, *Catharus ustulatus*: * # Not as numerous as Hermit Thrush, but fairly common. Several nests were found.
- Hermit Thrush**, *Catharus guttatus*: * # A common bird in forests; a nest with eggs was found on 5 June.
- American Robin**, *Turdus migratorius*: * # Uncommon in various habitats. A nest was found in a mine structure 1 June.
- Cedar Waxwing**, *Bombicilla cedrorum*: * # Uncommon; a nest with eggs was found 5 July, and recently fledged young were seen 24 July.
- Solitary Vireo**, *Vireo solitarius*: * # Uncommon; two nests were found 23 June, one with eggs and one with well-feathered young.
- Philadelphia Vireo**, *Vireo philadelphicus*: * # Apparently only uncommon. A nest with young, the first for the province, was found 27 June.
- Red-eyed Vireo**, *Vireo olivaceus*: A common summer resident, but no breeding evidence was noted.
- Tennessee Warbler**, *Vermivora peregrina*: * # The commonest warbler; nests with eggs were found 16 and 18 June; many broods were seen from 28 June on.
- Orange-crowned Warbler**, *Vermivora celata*: * # An uncommon summer resident, the first time it was ever encountered as such in Ontario. The first and only nest for the province was located 14 June when a female was flushed from a nest with eggs. Fledged young with their parents were also noted 12 July.
- Nashville Warbler**, *Vermivora ruficapilla*: * # Uncommon and not more numerous than the Orange-crowned Warbler; a juvenile bird 19 July was the only breeding evidence.
- Yellow Warbler**, *Dendroica petechia*: # Rarely encountered along the shores of Rathouse Bay, and no breeding evidence was found.
- Magnolia Warbler**, *Dendroica magnolia*: * # A fairly common bird in mixed woods, with several nests found and fledged young seen.
- Cape May Warbler**, *Dendroica tigrina*: # Rare in larger mixed woods.
- Yellow-rumped Warbler**, *Dendroica coronata*: * # Common mainly in coniferous woods. A single nest with eggs was located 26 June.
- Black-throated Green Warbler**, *Dendroica virens*: * # Uncommon in mixed woods with mature white spruce. The only evidence of breeding was a juvenile being fed by a parent on 21 July.
- Blackburnian Warbler**, *Dendroica fusca*: # Individuals were seen on only three occasions. Breeding is probable as a young of the year was recorded 21 July.
- Palm Warbler**, *Dendroica palmarum*: * # Rare in black spruce bogs. Evidence of breeding was a recently fledged juvenile recorded 28 July.
- Bay-breasted Warbler**, *Dendroica castanea*: * # Fairly common in mature mixed woods. Nests with eggs 15 June, and with young 21 June, were the first for Ontario. A recently fledged juvenile was seen 4 July.
- Blackpoll Warbler**, *Dendroica striata*: # A single male on 14 June was the only bird encountered. However, it was a singing male in breeding condition, suggesting the possibility of breeding.
- Black-and-white Warbler**, *Mniotilta varia*: * # Rare in mixed second growth; a young of the year was recorded 19 July.
- American Redstart**, *Setophaga ruticilla*: # Rare in deciduous forest. Probably breeding there, as a young of the year was recorded 5 August.
- Ovenbird**, *Seiurus aurocapillus*: * # Common in deciduous woods. A nest with young was found 25 June.
- Northern Waterthrush**, *Seiurus noveboracensis*: * # Common near lakes and rivers. Nests with eggs were found 16 and 22 June.
- Connecticut Warbler**, *Oporornis agilis*: # Rare in dense black spruce bogs.
- Mourning Warbler**, *Oporornis philadelphia*: # Rarely encountered in deciduous forest clearings.
- Wilson's Warbler**, *Wilsonia pusilla*: # Rare in alders bordering lakes and streams.

- Canada Warbler**, *Wilsonia canadensis*: # Rare in dense mixed second growth.
- Chipping Sparrow**, *Spizella passerina*: * # A common species of dry mixed forest; several nests were found.
- Vesper Sparrow**, *Poocetes gramineus*: # Singing males were twice noted in the mine clearing where habitat was scarcely suitable.
- Savannah Sparrow**, *Passerculus sandwichensis*: # Occasionally individuals appeared in the newly made mine clearing where habitat was not suitable for nesting. Apparently no suitable habitat was available elsewhere.
- Fox Sparrow**, *Passerella iliaca*: # Uncommon in dry mixed second growth. A very agitated pair on 6 July was the only evidence of breeding noted, however.
- Song Sparrow**, *Melospiza melodia*: * # Only five birds were encountered in the summer; one was a well-feathered juvenile on 29 July.
- Lincoln's Sparrow**, *Melospiza lincolni*: * # Common summer resident in all wet situations. Usually sang only at dawn and dusk, except on cloudy and rainy days when they would sing all day. A female with an egg ready to lay on 5 June, and a juvenile bird 19 July both indicated breeding.
- Swamp Sparrow**, *Melospiza georgiana*: * # An uncommon resident in the marshes bordering Rathouse Bay and Borthwick Lake. A new nest was found 4 June, later abandoned with a couple of eggs.
- White-throated Sparrow**, *Zonotrichia albicollis*: * # Common in all habitats. Several nests were found in the first two weeks of June and again in the first two weeks of July suggesting two broods were produced.
- Dark-eyed Junco**, *Junco hyemalis*: * # Common in drier, more open parts of most habitats. Also apparently being double-brooded with a pattern of nesting like the White-throated Sparrow.
- Red-winged Blackbird**, *Agelaius phoeniceus*: * # Common in marshy areas especially about Rathouse Bay. A nest with eggs was found 8 June.
- Western Meadowlark**, *Sturnella neglecta*: A single bird was seen and heard 31 May in the mine clearing.
- Rusty Blackbird**, *Euphagus carolinus*: # None encountered until early August when young of the year, probably raised not too far away, were moving about.
- Common Grackle**, *Quiscalus quiscula*: * # Uncommon but regular along the marshy borders of Rathouse Bay and Borthwick Lake. A nest with eggs was found 11 June.
- Purple Finch**, *Carpodacus purpureus*: * # Uncommon; a juvenile taken 18 July indicated local breeding.
- White-winged Crossbill**, *Loxia leucoptera*: Encountered fairly regularly only after 22 June, usually fewer than 10 a day, but one flock of 150.
- Hoary Redpoll**, *Carduelis hornemanni*: ! Reported to be a rare winter visitor.
- Pine Siskin**, *Carduelis pinus*: * # Common summer resident; newly fledged juveniles were frequently encountered in late July.

Hope's field notes do not provide details of the working conditions. For example, did he have a canoe or did he just wade into the water to locate grebe nests? Trying to carry a canoe through a kilometre of bush was not a practical proposition even if he had had access to one, however. I know that he tried unsuccessfully to identify the "owners" of a grebe nest by setting snares in one instance. The raft used on Rathouse Bay was

undoubtedly constructed on the site and perhaps he used this technique on Borthwick Lake as well. There were several comments in his journals about the "joys" of living with blackflies, and any who have tried can imagine the efforts of fieldwork in such a situation.

There are a number of species that might have been expected there that he did not record. Probably if he had had greater mobility both on land

and water, he would have seen more. His notes mention seeing two small gulls with black heads, but they were too far away to identify. They may have been Bonaparte's Gulls (*Larus philadelphia*). He also reports twice seeing either Common or Red-breasted Mergansers (*Mergus merganser* or *M. serrator*), also too far away to be certain of the identity.

The Favourable Lake trip followed field work at several other places in northern Ontario: on Lake Nipigon (1923, 1924), at Lake Abitibi (1925), in Rainy River District (1929), along northeastern Lake Superior (1936), in Sudbury District (1937), and near Kenora (1937). It was not expected then that any new species would be found, but Bufflehead and Orange-crowned Warblers were recorded breeding for the first time. The nests of Philadelphia Vireo and Bay-breasted Warbler were the first for the province. At the time, it was certainly a worthwhile effort in piecing together information on the avifauna of Ontario. It also provided a background for the more widespread breeding bird atlas program that followed many years later (1981 to 1985).

Acknowledgements

To Cliff Hope, whom I never had the opportunity to meet, I am indebted for the observations in this paper. I trust that he is happy to finally see them published and that I have

accurately conveyed his knowledge of the Favourable Lake Mine area.

I am also appreciative of the support of Charlotte Goodwin and Julia Matthews, in the Library and Archives of the Royal Ontario Museum. Figure 1 was reproduced with the assistance of Brian Boyle in the Photography Dept. of the ROM. George Peck conferred with me about the Lesser Yellowlegs record.

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